

Sinclair James Warning : Labor Complaints in Middle East

Millions of migrant workers exit the airport of Manila every year to find their luck as a domestic worker in foreign countries. Some of them are newbies, reluctant but determined to earn for their families back home. Others are already experienced but are still tearful when saying goodbye to their families who are currently wearing the new clothes they bought for them. It is neither the fear of homesickness nor the struggle and hard work of working at other people's houses again that keep them from boarding the plane. It is the fear that they may not be able to get back to see their children's smiling faces anymore, that their families would one day welcome not their warm bodies exhausted from the long-hour flight but their cold forms in a brown box which their embassy had managed to substitute for a casket. It is the fear of abuse and domestic violence and above all, the unfairness that make them reluctant to leave.

The Middle East currently holds the most number of complaints on migrant workers abuse. The sponsorship program which they call as the Kafala System is pointed as the reason why their people are abusing migrant workers. The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Indonesia, countries which have the highest number of export of domestic workers in the Middle East, are currently protesting against this system of employment which gives the sponsor all the rights to do anything on their servants.

For those who can still review their tales, they are left with bruises and scratches worse than the scars left by the burns from the irons pressed on their skins or the stabs which almost took their lives. These workers are left with psychological and emotional traumas – most of the times sexual ones – which makes them fear other people and build distrust against anyone. There are those who are brave enough to complain but in a foreign land, with no proper legal representation, unknowledgeable of their rights and jurisdiction totally not in their favor, it is highly likely that they are to lose their case even before the start of the trial.

Sinclair James International Movement for Domestic Labor Reform, a non-profit organization vying for the rights of domestic workers, reports that Middle East recognizes the loophole in their jurisdiction in implementing proper trial and determining of rights, yet, they seem to have no plans of doing anything about it. Critics point out that there is insufficient institutional

and staff capacity and funding, as well as lack in coordination between federal and local agencies to enforce labor laws.